

The Boundary Stones

MARKING THE LINES OF THE OLD DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA AND VIRGINIA.

A paper of exceptional interest to the people of Washington and vicinity was read recently before the Columbia Historical Society by Mr. Frederick E. Woodward on "The Boundary Stones of the Old District of Columbia and Virginia." It was full of valuable historical data that should be preserved, and on this account, no less than for its readable features, The Washington Herald reproduces it herewith by courtesy of Mr. Woodward, with map showing the location of the boundary stones. The text follows:

Occasionally one sees in the daily or weekly papers reference to the question of jurisdiction over that little tract of land, comprising thirty-two square miles and known as Alexandria County, Va., which for fifty-six years was an integral part of the District of Columbia—the original "ten miles square"—and which, legally or not, was retroceded to the State of Virginia July 9, 1846.

That unmistakable call of the wild, which leads us into the open air, under God's clear sky, fills our nostrils with the odor of the pine, or the aroma of the woods and field, and which seems the traveled way and up-to-date methods of locomotion and encourages old-time tramping across lots, sent the writer over the old boundary line which once separated the District of Columbia and Virginia, and is at present the dividing line between the counties of Alexandria and Fairfax, in an endeavor to locate and picture the present condition of the stones which were placed at intervals of one mile around the entire District.

Taking a small camera for picture making and a canvas bag across the shoulders containing maps, compass, and other necessary equipment, and accompanied by either an agreeable friend or an old acquaintance, he has traversed many a weary mile under the warm rays of a midsummer sun or the chilly winds of early autumn, and has garnered with the pictures of the old boundary stones a few items which may not be wholly devoid of interest to others.

When the District of Columbia was established by an act of Congress dated July 16, 1790, the initial or southern stone was set up on Jones' Point, on Hunting Creek, below Alexandria, Va., and from this point as a starting place, a territory ten miles square, or 100 square miles, was laid out with the corners of the square at the four cardinal points.

The first line was run due northwest ten miles to a point near Falls Church, Va., thence running at right angles ten miles to the northeast, crossing the Potomac River and into Maryland to a point near Woodside, Md., thence at right angles ten miles to a point near Chesapeake Beach Junction, then at right angles crossing for the second time the Potomac River, ten miles to Jones' Point Light, the place of beginning.

With elaborate ceremony and Masonic display, the corner stone was placed in position April 15, 1791, and the onward march of the "Territory of Columbia," as it was then called, was begun. Maj. Andrew Elliott, the surveyor under whose direction much of the survey work was done, completed the setting of the Virginia stones in 1791, and each one bears this date.

Carving a path forty feet wide (twenty feet on each side of the line) he placed a substantial stone, about one foot square at the end of each mile, thus perpetuating the line of survey.

Twenty-six of these stones were placed on Maryland territory, and still form the existing boundary between that State and the District of Columbia.

The remaining fourteen stones on the Virginia side of the Potomac River it is our purpose to visit and describe at this time.

The initial stone at Jones' Point is not at present visible, nor has it been seen for more than half a century. When the government light-house was erected in 1855, the stone was covered by some part of the inclosure. According to information furnished by Mr. F. E. Wilkins, the lightkeeper, the stone had been placed under a small embankment, held in place by a sea wall and not far from the south entrance door of the light-house. This embankment is ten feet in width, thirty feet in length, and about five feet high. A flight of steps leads from the door to the beach, and is accurately shown in our picture. The little grandson of Mr. Wilkins is standing immediately over the buried stone.

An inquiry made to the light-house board brought the answer that the board is unable to locate the stone, definitely, and says "an unverified statement places the stone under the front steps of the keeper's dwelling."

Jones' Point was selected as the southernmost point of the new territory by Gen. Washington, after due consideration and undoubtedly from a desire to include within the limits of the District the city of Alexandria, established thirty-five years before, and already a place of much importance. The exact point for the initial stone was found by using the Alexandria courthouse as a starting point, and running a line due southwest one-half mile, then following a westerly course until the margin of Hunting Creek was reached.

In the original act of Congress no provision was made for any territory in the State of Virginia nor for that part of Maryland lying south of the Eastern Branch, but on March 3, 1791, an additional act of Congress made the necessary changes, and the District of Columbia became a legal fact.

Strange stories reach our ears as we journey from place to place about the old stones and their virtues. No doubt the laws of the States or of the District relating to the sale of intoxicating liquors are at the bottom of many of the stories concerning the frequent removal of the stones and their replacement in a new and more favorable location, as pool tables and saloons are always to be found at the "District line."

More serious than this was the charge made to the writer, after the publication last summer, of his lecture on the Maryland stones, that little tract of land, comprising thirty-two square miles and known as Alexandria County, Va., which for fifty-six years was an integral part of the District of Columbia—the original "ten miles square"—and which, legally or not, was retroceded to the State of Virginia July 9, 1846.

It is my purpose now to describe in regular order the location of the various milestones and to exhibit such pictures as will best serve to show the present condition of each stone, and for this purpose a rough sketch of the location of the stones, with some reference to the surrounding country, is shown, upon which the various stones are indicated by proper numerals.

I invite you in imagination to come with me into the highways and byways of

the Old Dominion on a balmy day in June, when the fragrant odor of pine and balsam are in the air—a carpet of new green under foot, a comfortable feeling of satisfaction with all the world, a boon companion who is a good traveler and never grumbles, and a contented mind, and with these we will look at the abiding places of the first stones ever placed to mark the line between the city of Washington and the District of Columbia.

The second stone and the end of the first mile may be found in an open field adjoining the premises of Mr. Oscar Baggett, 1200 Wilkes street, Alexandria, Va. It is in good condition, and as our illustration shows is not seriously scarred or worn. Originally set in a garden about 160 yards south of the house 1200 Wilkes street, it was about three years ago dug up and carried to the edge of the field by the side of a high picket fence about 225 feet from its proper location—at which place we raised it upright high enough to photograph its several sides.

From this picture one gets an accurate idea of the original shape and size of the milestones, the lower half being left rough as it was quarried, while the remaining part of the stone was accurately sawed to one foot square, the top being beveled for four inches. The inscription on the northeast side is: "Jurisdiction of the United States—1791."

On the southwest side, "Virginia." On the northwest side, in very large figures, "1791," the date when the stone was placed in position, and on the southeast side, "Var. 0° 30' W." this being the variation of the magnetic needle at this place in 1791.

You will note the very small size of the letters on the District side of the stone (only about one inch in length), as compared with the same words on many of the succeeding stones, and also the very large date figures. The stone on the extreme southwestern limits of the city of Alexandria, and very close to the shops of the Southern Railway. With a little effort one can imagine himself in Alexandria, or Bell Haven, as it was then called, in the year 1791, and hear the solitary watchman blowing his horn at the street corners as he patrolled the streets at night, as a signal that all was well.

One quarter of a mile northwestward we pass the new and attractive station of the Southern Railway, and climb the long ascent of Shuter's Hill in search of "Southwest No. 2," which, however, has not been found. It might be well to say, in passing, that with this exception, every one of the forty original milestones have been located, and the whole or fragments of them have been photographed.

This stone was evidently placed on the east side of, and very close to, the Alexandria and Leesburg turnpike, on the eastern slope of Shuter's Hill, in a subdivision now known as Spring Ridge, and within a stone's throw of Fort Ellsworth, which was built by the Federal government in May, 1861. At this point we found a large force of workmen and teams engaged in carting away loam and gravel to be used on new roads. To our many inquiries as to the whereabouts of the old stone, we received the same answer—no one remembered the existence of such a boundary. The foreman of the road crew said that a very peculiar condition was known to exist there, a movement of surface earth which he called "creeping down hill," and which, if true, may have had something to do with the disappearance of this stone.

The next stone, "S. W. No. 3," stands on the southwestern side of the Leesburg and Alexandria turnpike in an open field or pasture belonging to Patrick Cunningham, about three-fourths of a mile from the stone of the Braddock, or old Leesburg, road.

We were much indebted to Mr. Norman E. Harris, a carpenter employed by Mr. Cortland Smith, for his friendly services in showing us the stone, which was not only located and not pierced the orange orange thick and escaped from the cruel barbed-wire fence, which, with the tremendous thickets, made access to the stone almost impossible. It is in poor condition, very much battered and bruised, the inscriptions being only partially legible. This was the first stone in Virginia to be placed, and was equal in size to the end of the mile, fell in a ravine, the surveyors measured back eighteen rods or poles, and accordingly, we find the stone marked "2 Miles 302 Poles."

One-half a mile westward may be seen the well-known Fairfax Theological Seminary, and still further westward the site of Fort Worth, one of the cordons of forts erected by the Federal government for the defense of the city of Washington.

All that remains of "S. W. No. 4" is a low scratchy stump, the entire top having been broken off and lost. Its position seems to indicate the fact that it has never been disturbed, but remains in the identical spot where Maj. Elliott placed it 117 years ago. It is broken off a few inches below the surface of the ground, and so hidden from view that a few clouds of earth thrown up by the plow covers it completely. Twice or thrice we passed it by without seeing it. Calling into our service the farmer, who is a neighbor, I ran the plow into the stone line enough to know where it is. We were finally directed to it.

It is on a tableland or plateau on land of Mr. Cortland Smith, and in the immediate vicinity of the three Federal forts which marked the line of the defenses of the city of Washington. It is also exactly southwest from the Capitol building at a distance of six miles.

This stone like the preceding one is broken and in poor condition. The entire base, with a few inches of the finished portion, was found lying on the ground in approximately the same spot where it had originally been placed. It was found by the location of the original stone on Andrew Elliott's first map of the District.

It is on the land of Mr. Francis L. Smith in a cultivated valley near the east bank of a small creek, some 30 feet north of the Leesburg turnpike. Here again we were indebted to one of the near-by inhabitants, Mr. Isaac Dean, for his services as guide and conductor, he cheerfully leaving his work for that purpose. We note here, curiously enough, that one idea seemed to possess the minds of all the men with whom we chanced to talk, viz., that we were surveying the line for the purpose of taking the Virginia portion back into the District. The women with whom we conversed almost without exception were of the opinion that we were surveying for another electric railroad into Washington city.

Stone No. 6 is exactly southwest from the White House. It is in the woods, and somewhat difficult to find. It is located on the east bank of a small creek, about 150 feet southeast from the Columbia turnpike, which crosses the line in front of

Mr. Payne's residence. This was the second Virginia stone to be placed at uneven distances, but as the end of the mile fell in a little stream near the turnpike, the stone was set 15 rods, or poles back on firm ground, and is marked "5 Miles 304 Poles." It is in poor condition, badly battered and chipped, only a part of the lettering being legible.

One-half mile west of this is Bailey's Cross Roads, and memory is quickened even now at the remembrance of the luscious repast of crackers, cheese, sardines, and coca cola partaken of in a tired, dusty, and almost famished condition, at the corner grocery store at that place. At this stone we are exactly southwest of the central part of Washington City.

Stone No. 7 stands in an open hay field, on land of Mr. W. H. Torrison, and is

distance northwest of the brick residence of Mr. M. E. De Putron, and nearly one mile north of the village of Falls Church, Va.

The stone is badly broken, two large pieces which have been broken off lying by its side, on the ground. Unlike the north corner stone, near Woodside, Md., and the east corner stone, near Chesapeake Beach railroad station, Maryland, both of which are three feet high and marked vertically, not horizontally, this one is but two feet high, and similar in size to the other intermediate stones. The lettering, however, is different, on this stone going "round the corner," a part of the inscription being on each side.

A large oak tree, twenty-five inches in diameter, and apparently seventy-five

feet high, has grown up so close to the stone as to seriously endanger it. In order to preserve the stone the tree should be cut down. As on all the Virginia stones, the date is 1791. Two magnificent oak trees, each three or four feet in diameter, mark the entrance to the country road on which the stone is situated.

Turning at right angles at this point the line of the District runs northwesterly to and across the Potomac River, at which point the jurisdiction of Virginia ends.

The first stone on this line—"N. W. No. 1"—stands in the heart of a grove of giant chestnuts, on land owned by Mr. James Anderson, and occupied by Mr. Frank Crimmins.

It is considerably broken at the top, the date being entirely destroyed.

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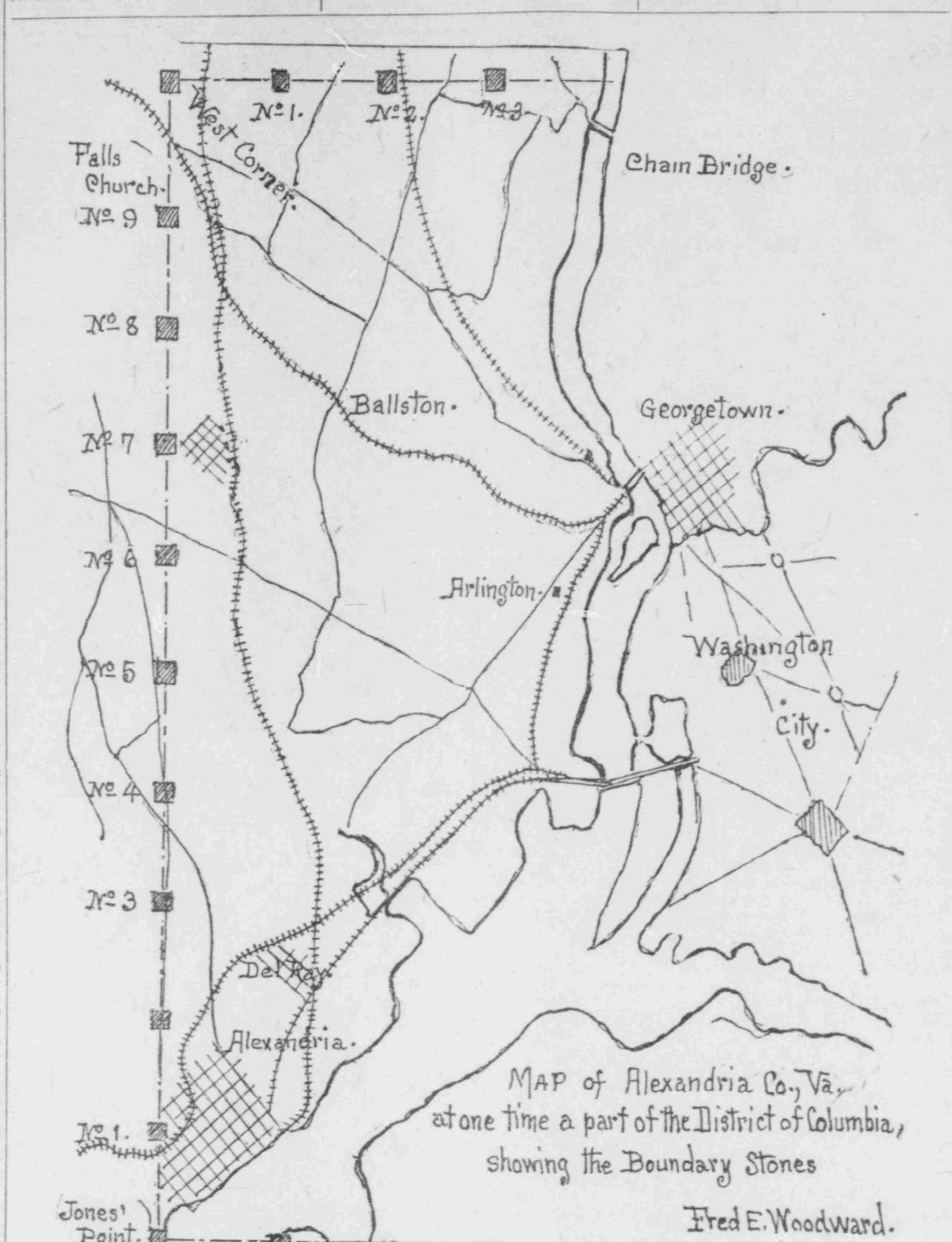
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